

*SAMPLE BRIEFING SHEET for community –based research class projects.*

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“Teaching Qualitative Methods Using Action-Oriented Research.”

This presentation will introduce how to teach qualitative inquiry through action research projects in graduate methods courses. Based on six years of using action research to teach qualitative research data collection and analysis, I will explain how to set up these course projects, facilitate student learning, and generate a final recommendation report which teaches students how to generate a qualitative analysis as well as report their findings back to community groups in useful formats. Action-oriented research questions are solicited from community agencies. The objective is for students to learn how to do qualitative research methods and develop a recommendation report for the community-based group or setting they are studying. The type of questions range from very simple, such as how a volunteer program could be improved, to quite complex ones, such as understanding why users of a neighborhood center racially segregate into different programs. Based on the class project, the recommendation report explains findings and make suggestions for social actions the community groups or agencies can implement to improve their practices. Recommendations range from simple suggestions, such as a manual for volunteers with clearer expectations laid out. Sometimes there is a discovery that neither the agency was aware of or the original question did not anticipate, and the discovery reshapes how the social phenomenon is being viewed. The degree of contact between the students and the community groups also vary from

full participatory inclusion of community members in the research process to students conducting independent research. Qualitative research methods courses using action research have the potential to address the gap between the growing interest of universities to conduct community-based research, and the reality that most teaching, learning and research in universities still has far to go to address “real world” problems.

Integrating action research projects into graduate classes

I teach a qualitative methods class where I have used an action research project to teach the techniques of doing qualitative research. For example, we have studied how the volunteer program could be improved at a childcare center. That is a relatively simple project of interviewing volunteers and the volunteer coordinator to find out how it is working and what improvements could be made to motivate volunteers to be more responsible and useful to the childcare center. A more complicated question has studied

For example, the staff at a childcare center is concerned that Korean parents seem dissatisfied with their educational opportunities, and yet what we found is that the dissatisfaction emerges from the parent-provider relationship, not the quality of the curriculum. The Korean parents were dissatisfied with a childcare center because they wanted more warm social interactions with their childcare providers, not more educational opportunities for their children.

## More info....

This presentation will talk about strategies to enhance both learning qualitative methods as well as making an action contribution to the community groups.

There are a RANGE OF COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PROJECTS in term of ACTUAL CONTACT with population studied

- No contact—e.g. agency needs demographic information on local residents; use American Factfinder to organize that data and give it to them.
- Some contact – Agency organizes focus groups for you and you go in and collect data on a question they want answered.
- Full contact – participant observation; students work with community members to study a problem together. Work on site with community members.

History of my CBR experience

- been doing this for six years in my graduate course on Qualitative Methods
- in response to a request from co-worker at the copy machine.
- each Qualitative Methods class,
- have an applied community-based research project;
- started first with 6 childcare centers here on campus

Since then, slowly developing the EXPECTATIONS AND PRODUCTS and how to balance COURSE CONTENT with APPLICATION.

Description of Practice –

- I solicit a question from a community organization,
  1. ask around, cold calls (e.g. Atwood Community Center-*why are programs used in a racially segregated way?*),
  2. ideas given to me (e.g. Oakwood-*how did addition of new wing and 142 residents impact upon their philosophy and spirit of “One Community”*),
  3. develop out of my own interests (e.g. study of professionals working with Latino families—*what are the issues for Latino families, what are the issues working with these families, how could the agencies work more collaboratively with one another*)
  
- meet with official organizational contact and find out what they want to learn about,
  - explain the type of methods we will be using,
  - what we can and can't do.
  - Explain it's a student project with time constraints. May not be consultant quality.
  
- I've done as many as six projects to only two in a class.

Main Points:

1. Importance of PREPLANNING work you do to set up project,
  - Briefing sheet to student (**see handout “Sample Briefing Sheet”**)
  - especially first contact or BRIEFING with organization (if organizational driven).

- This sets the stage in a very important way.
  - STRUCTURE with acknowledgement of FLEXIBILITY
  - Warn them that the question may change when we get there. (Important for faculty to attend this first meeting with students).
- Build time into your syllabus (reduced readings and group work during class).  
**(see handout “Items to Include On Your Syllabus”)**

BUT NOTE: Student satisfaction with workload does NOT VARY with reducing the readings.

The first time last semester I built in class time and it did NOT resolve any of the usual issues.

2. ANTICIPATE GROUP DYNAMICS AND BE RESPONSIVE (e.g. email insult). Major resistance is having to work outside of the class IN GROUPS. Small groups are best (3 people).
  - Conflict is inevitable!!
  - Build group work dynamics into the training process.
  - SIZE OF GROUPS– students get really frustrated in groups of more than five because of coordination of schedule problems;
  - just as easy to run seven projects as two to avoid this problem.
  
3. SCOPE OF PROJECT - SET realistic limits--need to be defined and reminded all the time.
  - Stating what the PRODUCT will be helps create these boundaries. Telling them when they have to stop and get to writing it up or whatever the final PRODUCT is helps. (see “Sample Report Format”)

- The report is also a PRODUCT that makes them feel good about what they've accomplished—not just a learning experience for them, but can see how they might have helped the organization as well.

NOTE: there is also always a *storm before they finish* the project because of their high expectations of themselves.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **Oakwood Village Continuing Care Retirement Communities West**

#### **Background**

Oakwood Village Continuing Care Retirement Communities West, an elderly residential center, added a new wing of 70 units onto its existing 237 units. At the same time, the experienced staff of a program director, social worker and activity director, were transferred to Oakwood Village East, an entirely new facility that was opening. New staff were hired to replace the experienced staff at Oakwood Village West, but no additional staff was hired to accommodate the increase in number of residents.

#### **Assignment**

We will explore how the recent addition of new residential units has impacted upon the sense of community that exists at Oakwood Village West. Some of the questions the organization would like us to address include:

- How did people (established residents, new residents, and staff) experience the changes that were brought on by adding a new residential wing at Oakwood Village West?
- How did the sense of community change for the established residents when new residents moved in and new staff replaced the experienced staff (who went to Oakwood Village East at the same time of move-in)?
- How was moving into an existing community experienced by new residents?
- What was the new staff perspective on this transition?

- How could decision-making about community activities be better shared by staff and residents?

## **Targeted Population**

Established residents, new residents, and staff

## **Product**

The purpose of exploring how this change was experienced in the past would be helpful to developing recommendations to ensure smooth transitions in the future additions of new residential units at both Oakwood Village West and East.

We will produce a report that describes the lived experiences of those we interview as well as develop interpretations that may contribute to better organizational practices. The analysis will be geared toward a list of recommendations for this latter purpose of the administration's interest in crafting future policies and practices for their organization. The report will be distributed to the Oakwood administration and residents.

## **Debriefing**

A debriefing meeting is set up on November 19 at Oakwood Village West.

## **Contact Person**

John Noreika, Director, 230-4252

*ITEMS TO INCLUDE ON YOUR SYLLABUS for classes with community-based research projects.*

- 1) Warn students that there is a group project and hands-on learning.

The course is organized as a semester long workshop. We will first read and learn about indepth interviewing and then we will apply them in a field research project based on a question brought to us by a community organization. Through participation in class discussions and this research project, students will get firsthand experiences designing indepth interview research and writing up analyses, including a final report of recommendations to the organizations. This hands-on approach will develop the student's ability as "human-as-instrument."

Students will spend time working on this project both in and outside of class. During the weeks where fieldwork is heavier, the reading load will lighten.

- 2) Build time for working on projects during class time into class syllabus.

Oct 22      Field – Briefing – Meeting with Organization

*Readings:* Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, Chapter 5

Oct 29      Field – Data Collection, Preliminary Analysis & More Research Design  
Considerations

*Reading:* Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, Chapter 1

Nov 5      Field – More Data Collection And Emergent Analysis/Defining The Focus

*Readings:* Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, Chapter 2

Nov 12      Field – More Data Collection and Interpretative Analysis

Nov 19      Field – Debriefing with the Organization and Research Targets

3) Include that students will grade each other's group participation and this will be included in final grade, as well as group grades for presentation and final written product.

- Participation in Group Report Writing (5 points individual grade)
- Participation in Group Project (5 points individual grade)

1) *Group Oral Presentation* (15 points group)

2) *Group Written Report* (15 points group)

*Developed by Lynet Uttal for HDFS 766 Indepth Interviewing (UW-Madison).*

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*SAMPLE REPORT FORMAT for community-based research class projects.*

## **FORMAT FOR FINAL REPORT**

### **PART A**

Title Page

Executive Summary (1-2 Pages)

List Of Recommendations

### **PART B**

Problem Statement

What question does this report address?

History of research question.

Who are the partners in this project?

- Include a description of the agency

And/Or

- Include a description of the major players/stakeholders

How did the project team get involved in doing this project?

### **PART C**

Brief summary description of methods used and final sample.

Brief explanation for why these methods are used. (explain what kind of data they collect and what kind of analysis they can lead to)

## **PART D**

Researchers' Background and Interest in this project

Who are you?

What is your experience doing this kind of research?

What is your relationship to this topic?

## **PART E**

Recommendations explained.

Using the data, state each of the recommendations and explain how they were arrived at.

1. **Ground the explanation** of each recommendation in data. (Here it is important to reference to the evidence that supports your recommendations: use “quotes”, tables, etc.)
2. Provide an **interepretive analysis** (what do you recommend beyond what the actual data speaks to—share what you as the researcher intuitively sense would also address the research question—here's where you bring in background knowledge that you have even if it didn't emerge directly from the empirical data collected. Because you see more than each person sees, your meta-analysis is valid, too).

## APPENDIX A The Research Process

### Description of Research Process (Methods and Emergent Decisions)

Describe all the ways used to collect data and explain why this method was used, what kind of information it allows the researcher to get (or what kinds of answers it allows the researcher to answer)

- Indepth interviewing
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Email questionnaires
- Archival materials
- Field Notes

Include description of instruments used (attach interview schedules—all of the major versions as they changed, observation sheets, samples of field notes, etc. as Appendices)

Describe research decisions that were made as they emerged and explain why the change was made. (e.g. how interview scheduled changed, why research team decided to also do focus groups)

For each method, describe sample (how many, how much was collected)

Describe how the sample emerged if decisions were made to target particular types of participants.

#### Description of the Analytic Process

Describe how the data was analyzed. Include explanation of decisions that were made.

Use class readings to label the type of analysis being conducted.

Include any coding sheets or emergent models.

APPENDIX B – Organization/Program/Topic materials from the group studied

APPENDIX C – Instruments

APPENDIX D – Samples of materials developed

Include excerpts of interview transcripts, field notes, coding sheets, etc.

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